



Andrew's volunteering story



Age: 42

Charity: Various wildlife charities over the years including the RSPCA, Citizen Science expeditions around the world. Currently volunteering with East Sussex Wildlife Rescue & Ambulance Service, as well as the Sussex Barn Owl Group.

Years volunteering: 32 years (since I was 10!)

Why did you get involved in volunteering?

Since I was about six years old, I've always had a healthy obsession with pets, farm animals, wildlife and the natural world. Being somewhere that I know wildlife lives (even if I don't see it) I find very restorative, which helps me to process my thoughts and feelings in a new way.

My volunteering is a way of giving back to nature and wildlife as a way of saying thank you for what's been given to me. I think planet earth is a beautiful place and some of my most special memories come from my time volunteering in the wilderness.

I first volunteered when I was 10, helping with my local RSPCA.

How did you get involved with the charities you've volunteered with?

I ordered a book once, called 'Green Volunteers', which shows multiple volunteering opportunities across the world for all different kinds of budgets. It was important for me to find a charity that had a scientific purpose e.g. rewilding or nature conservation and was audited in a way that made me feel comfortable that the activity they were participating in was legitimate wildlife volunteering (which isn't always the case).

I found Biosphere Expeditions in the book and thoroughly researched their papers and credentials before settling on a 'taster day'. I was hooked from there!

What sort of things do you do?

In the past I've been everywhere from Namibia with African leopards to Sumatra with native tigers, where activities included using telemetry equipment, prey surveys, setting leopard traps for radio-collaring, snare removal and tracking footprints.



Monitoring the health and physical condition of a leopard in the wild, and to place a radio collar on it. This helps track movements for reducing conflict with local farmers when their animals are grazing in the field.



Monitoring elephant behaviour via radio collars / telemetry.



Camera being set up for prey surveys.

I now volunteer closer to home at a wildlife hospital and rehabilitation centre for orphaned baby birds every spring and summer, helping feed and clean them so they're ready to be released into the wild again.



I also volunteer on site with the Sussex Barn Owl Trust, weighing and ringing birds of prey nesting on private estates.

How do you feel when you finish a volunteering activity?

A huge amount of gratitude that I was given the opportunity to get up close and personal with such incredible wildlife. Not everybody gets that opportunity in their lifetime

What has volunteering taught you?

I have a new level of respect for what some people dedicate their life towards. It can be tough work in uncomfortable conditions, so it teaches patience and resilience. I've also learned to work alongside many different personalities across cultures and nationalities which helps build empathy and an awareness of diversity amongst others.

This is coupled with lots of new skills in animal handling, wildlife care and outdoor activities like driving a team away from angry elephants!

Does it change how you look at other parts of your life?

Yes, it makes me realise that we're just one life playing out amongst millions of others, humans and animals, side by side. Every living thing is out each day just trying to mostly do what they can to make their life a little better.

How often do you volunteer? At least once a week.

What's the best thing about volunteering?

Meeting other passionate volunteers, seeing beautiful nature up close and helping wild animals to thrive.

Have you noticed any physical benefits?

Getting loads of steps in and cardio resilience. Catching swallows with nets puts you through your paces and exercises muscles you don't normally use!

Has it impacted your mental health in a positive way?

It helps reduce stress and anxiety and gives me the opportunity to think through situations over more time. I also practice mindfulness more frequently outdoors.

Have you made friends through volunteering?

Yes, I've stayed in touch with many volunteers over many years. They say the route of friendship is embedded in shared human experiences.

Do you get to see the impact of your volunteer work?

Biosphere Expeditions provide a publicly available scientific impact report after every year of volunteering. The East Sussex Wildlife Rescue & Ambulance Service provides annual figures on baby bird casualties, species and number of releases that likely wouldn't have happened without the work of the volunteers. The Sussex Barn Owl Group provides an annual report on the state of play for number of birds ringed, breeding status, brood size and sex of each bird.

What's the most rewarding part of volunteering?

Giving back to nature that has given so much to me.

The most surprising part of volunteering?

How important people and communities are in securing the future of vulnerable wildlife.

What would you say to someone considering volunteering?

Find your 'spirit' charity and find a way to give back that works for you. Volunteering doesn't have to be physical and on-site and should be inclusive. There are many ways to help e.g. knitting the baby bird nests that we use to care for the orphans to keep them warm and in a more natural environment.

Has volunteering inspired other parts of your life?

It's shaped my career! I'm the Volunteering Proposition Manager at AXA UK and I cover all things volunteering and fundraising.

I love that I get to showcase how AXA gives back to our local communities by supporting charities and causes that are close to our hearts. Not many companies give their colleagues 21 hours (pro-rata) paid volunteering time per year and I'm very proud to work at an organisation that prioritises this.

Return to article: [The Health and Wellbeing Benefits of Volunteering.](#)